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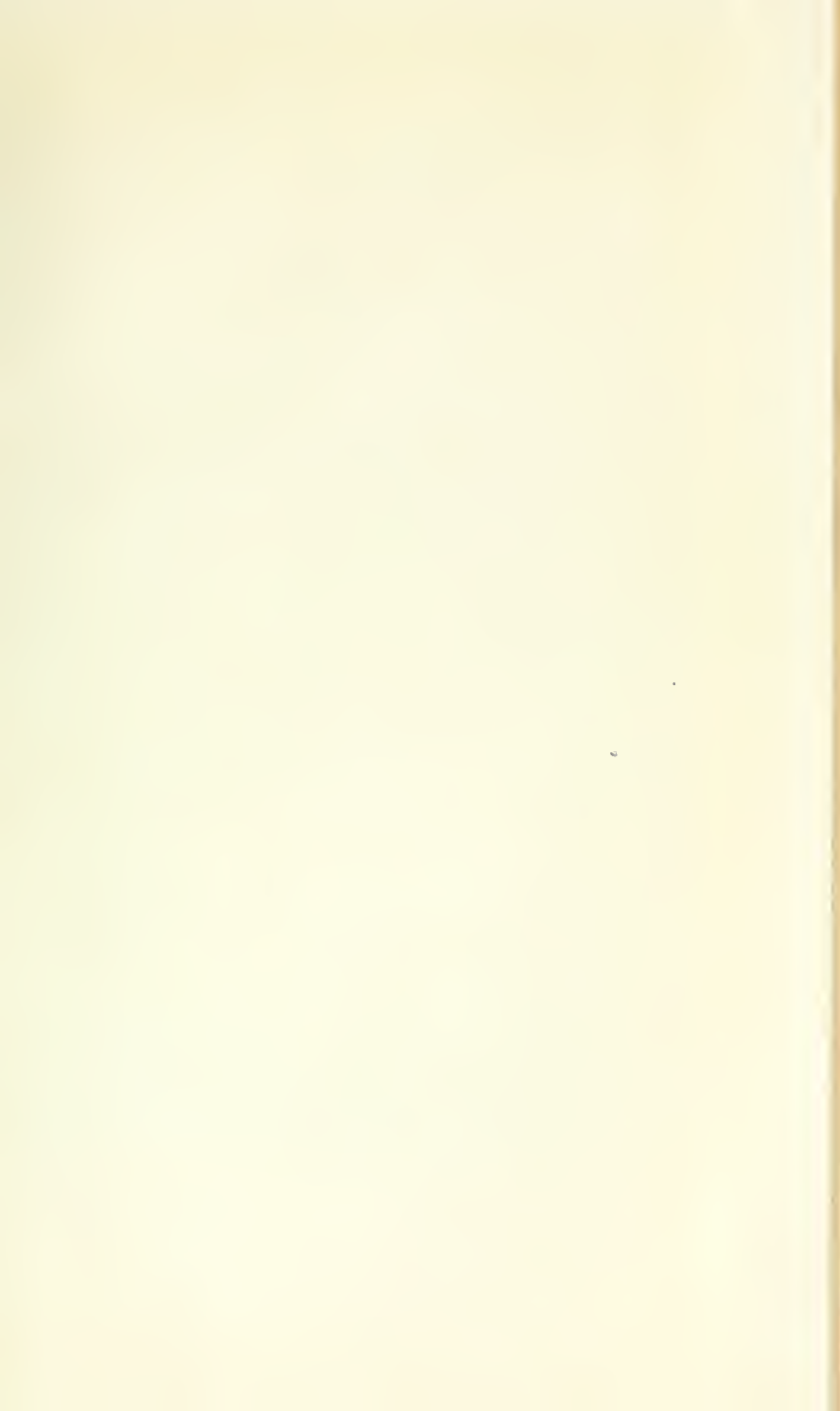




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VICTORIA, QUEEN AND EMPRESS.

Reproduced from the particular Photograph selected by the Queen, 9th April, 1897.

A VINDICATION.



4th (Jubilee) Edition.

BURNS

EXCISE OFFICER AND POET.

SEVENTEEN ILLUSTRATIONS. THREE FAC-SIMILES.

Nemo

Ne



Impune

Lacessit.

By JOHN SINTON, Supervisor of Inland Revenue, Carlisle.

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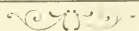
TO

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

THE EARL OF ROSEBERY, K.G., K.T.,

HONORARY PRESIDENT

OF THE BURNS FEDERATION.



To D. M. Macgillivray Esq.
With my sincere regards
J. D. Smith



Brooklyn

EXTRACTS

FROM THE ADDRESS DELIVERED AT GLASGOW ON THE
CENTENARY OF THE POET'S DEATH, 21ST JULY, 1896,

BY LORD ROSEBERRY.

20707 1896-1897
"THE secret of Burns' extraordinary hold on mankind lies in two words—inspiration and sympathy. Try and reconstruct Burns as he was. A peasant, born in a cottage that no sanitary inspector in these days would tolerate for a moment; struggling with desperate effort against pauperism, almost in vain; snatching at scraps of learning in the intervals of toil, as it were with his teeth; a heavy silent lad, proud of his ploughing. All of a sudden, without preface or warning, he breaks out into exquisite song like a nightingale from the brushwood, and continues singing as sweetly—with nightingale pauses—till he dies. A nightingale sings because he cannot help it; he can only sing exquisitely, because he knows no other. So it was with Burns. What is this but inspiration? One can no more measure or reason about it than measure or reason about Niagara. If his talents were universal, his sympathy was not less so. His tenderness was not a mere selfish tenderness for his own family, for he loved all mankind except the cruel and the base. Nay, we may go further, and say that he placed all creation, especially the suffering and despised part of it, under his protection. The oppressor in every shape, even in the comparatively innocent embodiment of the factor and the sportsman, he regarded with direct and personal hostility.

We have something to be grateful for even in the weaknesses of men like Burns. Mankind is helped in its progress almost as much by the study of imperfection as by the contemplation of perfection. Had we nothing before us in our futile and halting lives but saints and the ideal we might well fail altogether. We grope blindly along the catacombs of the world, we climb the dark ladder of life, we feel our way to futurity, but we can scarcely see an inch around or before us. We stumble and falter and fall, our hands and knees are bruised and sore, and we look up for light and guidance. Could we

see nothing but distant, unapproachable impeccability, we might well sink prostrate in the hopelessness of emulation and the weariness of despair. Is it not then, when all seems blank and lightless and lifeless, when strength and courage flag, and when perfection seems as remote as a star, is it not then that imperfection helps us? When we see that the greatest and choicest images of God have had their weaknesses like ours, their temptations, their hour of darkness, their bloody sweat, are we not encouraged by their lapses and catastrophes to find energy for one more effort, one more struggle? Where they failed we feel it a less dishonour to fail; their errors and sorrows make, as it were, an easier ascent from infinite imperfection to infinite perfection. Man after all is not ripened by virtue alone. Were it so this world were a paradise of angels. No! Like the growth of the earth, he is the fruit of all the seasons—the accident of a thousand accidents, a living mystery—moving through the seen to the unseen. He is sown in dishonour; he is matured under all the varieties of heat and cold: in mist and wrath, in snow and vapours, in the melancholy of autumn, in the torpor of winter, as well as in the rapture and fragrance of summer, or the balmy affluence of the spring—its breath, its sunshine, its dew. And at the end he is reaped—the product, not of one climate, but of all; not of good alone, but of evil; not of joy alone, but of sorrow—perhaps mellowed and ripened, perhaps stricken and withered and sour. How, then, shall we judge anyone? How, at any rate, shall we judge a giant—great in gifts and great in temptation; great in strength and great in weakness? Let us glory in his strength and be comforted in his weakness. And, when we thank heaven for the inestimable gift of Burns, we do not need to remember wherein he was imperfect, we cannot bring ourselves to regret that he was made of the same clay as ourselves.”



PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION.

THE following Paper was communicated to the last Quarterly Meeting of the Carlisle Burns Club by Mr. Sinton, one of the vice-presidents. It was very highly appreciated by the members present; and, in their opinion, it effectually refutes the widespread but mistaken notion that Burns' career as an Excise Officer was marred by irregular conduct.

W. MATHER, *President.*

CARLISLE, September, 1895.

JNO. JARDINE, *Secretary.*

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION.

THE human heart is ever the same, whether in hut or palace; throughout the world; and throughout the centuries. Burns spoke straight to the human heart. He voiced, in his own personality, the emotions of all mankind. Guided by the unerring instincts of a brave and intelligent people, whose national motto is "*Nemo me impune lacessit*," the Scotch have held high his banner, and defended the fame of his name against all comers, for a century. They have greedily grasped at facts which prove the falsehood of charges levelled against him, sometimes by friends, and always by foes. So, now, go forth, our second battalion of facts, for "Facts are chiels that winna ding, and downa be disputed."

CARLISLE, 20th December, 1895.

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION.

THE search-lights of a century have revealed many favourable facts, and exposed many plausible fictions relative to the Poet's career. It is gratifying to know that this unassuming, but authoritative, contribution to the truth, has helped somewhat to fulfil the Poet's prophecy:—"They will ken me better, and think mair o' me, a hundred years after I am dead."

39 CAVENDISH PLACE,
CARLISLE, 11th July, 1896.

INTRODUCTION
TO
FOURTH (JUBILEE) EDITION.

THIS year we have been celebrating the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, who has reigned for sixty years the monarch and mother of her people—

“ Not swaying to this faction or to that,
Not making her high place the lawless perch
Of winged ambitions, nor a vantage ground
For pleasure ; but through all this tract of years
Wearing the white flower of a blameless life.”

A noble and worthy Queen, who “ne’er forgets her people.” A Queen who, on the morning of her Commemoration Day, sent flashing round the world her electric message :—“From my heart I thank my beloved people ; may God bless them !” How different it is now to what it was a hundred years ago, when he, a man of the people, the people’s Poet, wrote :—

“ Who will not sing ‘ God save the King ’
Shall hang as high’s the steeple,”

yet considered it necessary to add the proviso :—

“ *But*, while we sing ‘ God save the King,’
We’ll ne’er forget the people.”

Last year we commemorated the death-day of Robert Burns. Lord Rosebery was chosen to be the voice and mouthpiece of millions who, at home and beyond the seas, admire the National Bard ; and nobly he fulfilled his mission. The patriot peasant and the patriot peer clasped hands across the century ; and those who had the privilege of being present felt that, henceforth, the character of Burns as a man would appear in a better, because in a truer, light.

But, although it seems invidious to direct attention to a fly, or a supposed fly, in the amber, it is the general opinion that Lord Rosebery was “unsound”—in Scottish phrase—on one

point. It was *not* well that Burns died when he did. Dark clouds had gathered around him towards the end of his life, but they had begun to disperse before he died. The sun was still shining behind the clouds, and patches of blue had begun to appear in the sky. Burns was "done" physically, but not mentally. Had he been restored to health he would have sprung again to his feet in all the strength and brilliancy of his matchless genius. His own inalienable holly wreath, undimmed by debt and menial toil, would have glistened above his undaunted brow with added lustre; his peerless Poet's mantle, purified by infliction and strengthened by reflection, would have clung to his shoulders in firmer folds, and the second volume of his life's work would have outshone the first.

In view of the now universally-admitted-fact that, during the last seven years of his life, Burns continued to toil under the rigorous discipline of the Excise Authorities to their entire satisfaction, and with continuous promotion to himself, it seems impossible to believe that any person possessed of ordinary intelligence can continue to give credit to the exaggerated and, in many instances, baseless charges which have been levelled against his character as a man, after he was no longer alive to defend himself. Were you, my prejudiced friend, capable of sincerely praying—

" Oh, that Thou the gift would gi'e us
To see oorsel's as ithers see us"—

you would speak less about the human faults and failings of Burns, and think more about your own.

CARLISLE, July, 1897.



The Birthplace of Robert Burns.

By ROBERT G. INGERSOLL.

Though Scotland boasts a thousand names
Of patriot, king, and peer,
The noblest, grandest of them all
Was loved and cradled here.
Here lived the gentle peasant-prince,
The loving cottar-king,
Compared with whom the greatest lord
Is but a titled thing.

'Tis but a cot roofed in with straw—
A hovel made of clay ;
One door shuts out the snow and storm,
One window greets the day.
And yet I stand within this room
And hold all thrones in scorn,
For here, beneath this lowly thatch,
Love's sweetest bard was born.

Within this hallowed hut I feel
Like one who clasps a shrine
When the glad lips, at last, have touched
The something deemed divine.
And here the world, through all the years,
As long as day returns,
The tribute of its love and tears
Will pay to Robert Burns !

BURNS, EXCISE OFFICER AND POET.

A VINDICATION.



[Photo. by Austin, Stenwix.]

BURNS COTTAGE.

OUR object is to prove, by indisputable facts and authentic records, not only that the Poet's promotion as an Excise Officer was never retarded by any censure from the Board, either for the political opinions he held, for personal misconduct, or for neglect of duty; but that he was a zealous and efficient officer from the day he entered the service in 1789 until the end of his career in 1796; all the rumours, surmises, and ingenious fabrications of his detractors, critics, and imperfectly-informed biographers, notwithstanding.

I rely upon the important private records of the Scotch Board of Excise, the unpremeditated evidence incidentally

supplied by Burns himself, the weighty corroboration of his official superiors, his continuous promotion, and the position he occupied in the service when he died, to prove my case.

Dr. Currie expressed a hope that the errors into which he had fallen as the first biographer of Burns would not be very important, and he explained that they would be easily accounted for by those who knew the circumstances under which the undertaking had been performed. Unfortunately the errors are both numerous and important, and, as succeeding commentators have copied from Currie and from one another, the Poet's Excise career has hitherto been greatly misunderstood and seriously misrepresented. Dr. Currie failed to perceive the import of many essential facts, owing to his ignorance of Excise methods and practice, and, what is worse, many of his inferences are erroneous. Cromek, Cunningham, Lockhart, Waddell, Gilfillan, and many more, followed suit; and hence the admirers of the Poet have hitherto been sorrowfully silent from a dread, rather than from a knowledge, of any facts supposed to reflect discredit on his Excise career. They have been afraid to look into the closet in which the Excise Skeleton was supposed to hang, but now the door has been thrown wide open, and behold! there is no skeleton there.

Every entry relating to Burns was carefully extracted from the original registers of the Scotch Board of Excise by my friend, Mr. R. W. Macfadzean, at present Chief Clerk of Inland Revenue, Greenock; under the personal supervision of his father, Mr. James Macfadzean, then an Inspector at the Chief Office, Somerset House, and now a retired Collector of Inland Revenue, at Glasgow.* The Registers have disappeared, but the extracts remain; and the service thus rendered to the Poet's memory can scarcely be over-estimated.

1781-88. AGE 22-29.

Early in life, Burns entertained an idea of entering the Excise. In his nineteenth year he was engaged in the study of gauging, land-surveying, mensuration, dialling, and kindred subjects, at Kirkoswald, where he came in contact with numerous smugglers

* Appendix A.



[Photo. by W. H. Williams, Officer of Inland Revenue, Dunfries.]

HOUSE (WITH THE LAMP) WHERE BONNIE JEAN LIVED.

and their natural enemies, the Excise and Customs officers. In his twenty-third year—at midsummer, 1781—he proceeded to Irvine, another smuggling seaport, where he failed in the flax-dressing business, and returned to Lochlea in March, 1782. Here he toiled beside his father on the farm until “the saint, the father, and the husband” died on 12th February, 1784. The family then removed to Mossgiel, and here also farming proved a failure. Mossgiel is about a mile from Mauchline, where bonnie Jean lived with her parents.

The Kilmarnock edition of his poems, published on 31st July, 1786, produced about £20, and Burns took a steerage passage in a vessel bound for the West Indies; his chest was on the road to Greenock, and he had written his pathetic lines :—

“ Farewell old Coila's hills and dales,
Her heathy moors and winding vales ;
Farewell, my friends ; farewell, my foes ;
My peace with these ; my love with those :
The bursting tears my heart declare :
Farewell, the bonnie banks of Ayr.”

And those to the Brethren of St. James' Lodge, Tarbolton :—

“ Adieu ! a heart warm, fond adieu !
Dear brothers of the mystic tie !

Oft have I met your social band,
And spent the cheerful, festive night ;
Oft, honoured with supreme command,
Presided o'er the *Sons of Light* :
And by that *hieroglyphic* bright
Which none but *Craftsmen* ever saw !
Strong memory on my heart shall write
Those happy scenes when far awa.

May Freedom, Harmony and Love,
Unite you in the *grand design*,
Beneath the Omniscient Eye above,
The glorious Architect Divine !
That you may keep the *unerring line*
Still rising by the *plummet's law*,
Till Order bright completely shine,
Shall be my prayer when far awa'.”

At this juncture, the Poet, having heard of Dr. Blacklock's letter to the Rev. George Lawrie, Minister at Loudoun, extolling his poems, and suggesting a second edition, recalled his chest, postponed sailing, and some of his Ayrshire friends, though unsuccessfully, endeavoured to procure for him an appointment in the Excise.

His Kilmarnock printer having declined to publish a second edition of his poems without security (!) Burns proceeded to Edinburgh in November, 1786. his second edition was published in April, 1787, and he became the happy possessor of £500. With characteristic generosity he forwarded about half the amount to his mother and the family at home. “I was conscious,” said he, “that the wrong scale of the balance was pretty heavily charged, and I thought that throwing a little filial piety, and fraternal affection, into the scale in my favour might help to smooth matters at the *grand reckoning*.”

Early in May, the Poet, mounted on his famous grey mare, “Jenny Geddes,” and accompanied by Ainslie, a young Edinburgh solicitor, set out on his Border tour. They reached Jedburgh about the middle of May, and Burns notes in his journal :—“Charming romantic situation. Fine old ruins : a



[Photo. by J. Valentine, Dundee.

JEDBURGH ABBEY.

once magnificent cathedral, and strong castle. 'Town has the appearance of old rude grandeur, but the people extremely idle. Walk up Jed with Miss Lindsay and other ladies to be shown Love-lane and Blackburn—two fairy scenes. Was presented by the magistrates with the freedom of the burgh. My heart is thawed into melting pleasure, after being so long frozen up in the Greenland bay of indifference, amid the noise and nonsense of Edinburgh. Jed, pure be thy crystal streams, and hallowed thy sylvan banks. Presented Miss Lindsay with my portrait. Took farewell of Jedburgh with some melancholy disagreeable sensations. Sweet Isabella Lindsay; may peace dwell in thy bosom, uninterrupted except by the throbbing of rapturous love!"

Continuing his journey by Newcastle, Hexham, Wardrew and Longtown, the Poet arrived at Carlisle on the evening of 31st May, 1787, and took up his quarters for the night at the Malt Shovel Inn, Rickergate.

Burns wrote a letter the same evening or next morning to his friend W. Nicol of the High School, Edinburgh, the broad



[Photo. by J. Robson, Carlisle.]

MALT SHOVEL INN, CARLISLE.

vernacular of which few latter-day Scotchmen will be able to interpret:—"Carlisle, June 1, 1787 (or, I believe, the 39th o' May rather). Kind Honest-Hearted Willie, I'm sittin doon here, after seven and forty miles ridin', e'en as forjeskit and forniaw'd as a forfochten cock, to gie ye some notion o' ma land-louper-like stravaigin sin the sorrowfu' hoor that I sheuk hands and pairted wi auld Reekie.

My auld gad gleyde o' a meere has huchall'd up hill and doon brae in Scotland and England, as teugh an' birnie as a verra deil wi' me. It's true she's as poor's a sangmaker, and as hard's a kirk, and tipper taipers when she taks the gate like a lady's gentlewoman in a minuwae, or a hen on a het girdle, but she's a yauld poutherie girran for a' that I'll be in Dumfries the morn, gif the beast be to the fore an' the branks bide hale. Guid be wi ye Willie! Amen!—R. B."

Next day his friend, Mr. Mitchell, showed him round the old Border city, and through his print works, in which about 600 hands were employed. After dining with Mr. Mitchell, the Poet returned to the inn, and was informed by Peter Reid the



[Photo, by J. Valentine, Dundee.

TOWN HALL, CARLISLE (IN WHICH THE POET WAS FINED).

landlord that "Jenny Geddes" had been found trespassing on "the Bitts,"—a piece of unenclosed corporation grass—and was shut up in the corporation pin-fold. After considerable trouble and delay and the payment of a small fine inflicted by the Mayor, the indignant Poet prepared to resume his journey. As he was about to mount into the saddle he pointed towards the Town Hall and exclaimed:—"Come on my lass, ye'll be a mare when he's nae mair." With that he cantered off towards Annan; and thence, by Dumfries and Ellisland, to Mossgiel.

Burns returned to Edinburgh in the Autumn, and became a frequent visitor at the house of Mr. Nimmo, Excise Officer, Alison Square; and here he first met "Clarinda."

The Poet's experiences in Edinburgh were, essentially, unsatisfactory upon the whole. He disliked the refined insincerities and insipid conventionalities of fashionable society, heralded, as they too frequently were, by "the cold, obsequious, dancing-school bow of politeness." He appreciated the genuine guinea, but he preferred the unminted gold to a guinea-stamped

counterfeit coin. When taken to task in Leith Walk by a modish city acquaintance for speaking to an honest Ayrshire friend dressed in hodden gray : "What !" exclaimed Burns, "do you think I was speaking to the man's clothes? No! I was speaking to the man : and that man, let me tell you, has more sense and worth than nine out of ten of my fine Edinburgh friends."

Burns soon became weary of wandering aimlessly about Edinburgh, and he wrote to the Earl of Glencairn in January :—"I wish to get into the Excise. I have weighed—long and seriously weighed—my situation, my hopes, and turn of mind, and am fully fixed to my scheme if I can possibly effectuate it. I have resolved from maturest deliberation, and now I am fixed, I shall leave no stone unturned to carry my resolve into execution. I have not yet applied to anybody else. Indeed, my heart sinks within me at the idea of applying to any other of the Great who have honoured me with their countenance. I am ill qualified to dog the heels of greatness with the impertinence of solicitation, and tremble nearly as much at the thought of the cold promise, as the cold denial." This application had no immediate result and he made one—and only one—personal endeavour to secure a little of that possible patronage of which we have all heard so much ; and with the following result :—"I have almost given up the Excise idea. I have been just now to wait on a great person, Miss ——'s friend, —— . Why will great people not only deafen us with the din of their equipage, and dazzle us with their fastidious pomp, but they must also be so very dictatorially wise? I have been questioned like a child about my matters, and blamed and schooled for my political inscription on the Stirling window. Come, curse me Jacob ; come, defy me Israel !"

But Burns could not brook delay, so "kind auld Sandy Wood, the doctor," procured an Excise appointment for him from Mr. Graham of Fintry, one of the Commissioners of Excise.

With the exception of good old Dr. Blacklock and one or two others, the clear-headed but cold-hearted Edinburgh gentry of the period lionized, and then left him. Your society people treat all their lions alike. Deserted by his influential Edinburgh

BURNS AND HIS CONTEMPORARIES IN THE HOUSE OF LORD MONBODDO, JOHN STREET, EDINBURGH.

From the Painting by James Edga.



1. Lord Monboddo. 2. Mrs. D. 3. Lord Monboddo. 4. Miss Burnett, Daughter of Lord Monboddo. 5. Principal Robertson. 6. Burns. 7. Mrs. D. 8. Mrs. D. 9. Mrs. D. 10. Mrs. D. 11. Mrs. D. 12. George Thomson. 13. George Thomson. 14. William Smith, Printer. 15. Captain Good. 16. William Graham, Burns Publisher. 17. Burns. 18. Burns.



[Photo. by W. H. Williams.]

THE NITH AT ELLISLAND.

acquaintances, Burns was left to solve the problem of his future life, alone. He was now halting at a point where four roads meet. His life hitherto had been, chiefly, "a galling load, along a rough, a weary road." He had found in it only:—

"Some drops of joy—with draughts of ill between :
Some gleams of sunshine—mid renewed storms."

And here he halts, "unfitted with an aim," gazing wistfully along the roads in front and on either side. Shall he select gauging, or farming, or a combination of both? He deliberates long and seriously. He is a man of sound sense and clear judgment, and he wisely decides to secure his Excise commission, to retain it in his possession, to take a farm, and, if farming fails, to fall back upon active employment in the Excise. What else, or better, could he have got or done?

1788-91. AGE, 20, 32.

The Poet finally left Edinburgh on 24th March, 1788; attended at Tarbolton for a six weeks course of Excise "instructions," under James Findlay, officer there; secured



[Photo. by W. H. Williams.]

ELLISLAND FARM HOUSE.

his Excise commission, entered on his farm at Ellisland, and married his bonnie Jean.*

Leaving his young wife at Mauchline, Burns proceeded to his new farm at Ellisland, on 14th June, 1788. He set about building a new farmhouse, and "had no acquaintance older than yesterday, except "Jenny Geddes," the old mare I ride on." Leading a lonely life, he gazed wistfully westward towards Mauchline, where his young bride was temporarily left alone, and poured forth his soul in the evergreen lyric:—

O' a' the airts the wind can blaw
 I dearly loe the west ;
 For there the bonie lassie lives,
 The lassie I loe best ;
 Though wild woods grow, and rivers row,
 And monie a hill between ;
 Baith day an' night my fancy's flight
 Is ever wi' my Jean.

*NOTE:—The order for instructions:—"EDINBURGH, 31st March, 1788. To Mr. James Findlay. The Commissioners order that you instruct Mr. Robert Burns in the art of gauging when he is well instructed and qualified for an officer (then and not before, at your perils), you and your supervisor are to certify the same to the Board that the above Mr. Robert Burns hath cleared his quarters both for lodging and diet, that he has actually paid each of you for his instructions and examination, and that he has sufficient at the time to purchase a horse for his business. (Signed) A. PEARSON."

There's not a bonie flower that springs
 By fountain, shaw, or green ;
 There's not a bonie bird that sings
 But minds me o' my Jean.

The Poet wrote to Miss Chalmers in September :—"I bind every day after my reapers. I have my Excise Commission in my pocket for any emergency. *If I could set all before your view, whatever disrespect you, in common with the world, have for this business, I know you would approve of the idea.* The question is not at what door of Fortune's palace we shall enter in, but what door does she open to us. I got my Excise appointment without hanging on or mortifying solicitation." Four months afterwards he wrote to Bishop Geddes :—"In the affair of a livelihood I think I am tolerably secure. . . . There is a certain stigma affixed to the character of an Excise officer, but I do not intend to borrow honour from any profession."

The Poet's keen sense of independence as a man prevented his angling for a "post or pension" as a poet. "I got this," said he, "without hanging on or mortifying solicitation." He faced the odium at that time attaching to the office, from a sense of duty to his wife and family, as indicated in the following lines written to Dr. Blacklock :—

"But what d'ye think, my trusty fier,
 I'm turned a gauger—Peace be here !
 Parnassian queans, I fear, I fear,
 Ye'll now disdain me,
 And then my fifty pounds a year
 Will little gain me.

 Ye ken, ye ken,
 That strang necessity supreme is
 'Mang sons o' men.

 I hae a wife and twa wee laddies,
 They maun hae brose and brats o' duddies ;
 Ye ken yoursel's my heart right proud is :
 I need na vaunt,
 But I'll sned besoms—thraw saugh woodies,
 Before they want."

In the face of these and similar statements deliberately made by Burns himself after full consideration, is it not treating him

like a child as the "great man" did in Edinburgh to expatiate about the supposed mistake he made in entering the Excise?



[Photo. by W. H. Williams.

STACKYARD AT ELLISLAND, IN WHICH BURNS COMPOSED
"TO MARY IN HEAVEN."

Ceres and Venus now walked hand in hand with the inspired Bard. After working hard in the harvest field all day on 20th October, 1789, the anniversary of Highland Mary's death, the Poet lay stretched on his back in the keen night air on the level ledge of a partially used stack of hay. He was gazing into "the brave o'erhanging firmament, fretted with golden fire." His eyes were fixed on a bright particular star, which "shone like another moon." If you have any poetry in your soul: if you have ever "loved and lost" a gentle sweetheart; a devoted wife; a darling child; pause, and read line by line:—

TO MARY IN HEAVEN.

Thou ling'ring star, with less'ning ray,
That lov'st to greet the early morn,
Again thou usher'st in the day
My Mary from my soul was torn.

Still o'er these scenes my mem'ry wakes,
And fondly broods with miser care!
Time but the impression deeper makes,
As streams their channels deeper wear.

My Mary !—dear departed shade !

Where is thy place of blissful rest ?

See'st thou thy lover lowly laid ?

Hear'st thou the groans that rend his breast ?

The Poet returned into his house, penned the lines as they now stand, in all their immortal beauty, and handed them to his noble wife, who used to tell the story, with sympathetic tears in her eyes, long after he was dead and in his grave.

As the farm was not “turning out well,” Burns applied to Mr. Graham in the Autumn for active employment in the Excise, and he was immediately appointed to Dumfries 1st Itinerancy, in which Ellisland was situated. His name appears in the Alphabetical Register, 1789, and his character is:—“Never tried, a Poet *” with a subsequent interlineation, by a different hand, “Turns out well.” * On 23rd December, 1789, he wrote to The Countess of Glencairn:—“Considering my unlucky bargain of a farm, I find £50, which is now our salary, an exceeding good thing. People may talk as they like of the ignominy of the Excise ; but what will support my family and keep me independent of the world is, to me, a very important matter ; and I had much rather that my profession borrowed credit from me than that I borrowed credit from my profession. Another advantage I have in this business is the knowledge it gives me of the various shades of human character, and consequently, assisting me in my poetic pursuits.”

Burns now led a busy life as Farmer, Excise Officer, and Poet. His excise station comprised fourteen circuits, technically termed Rides,† and he had to travel about thirty miles a day in the performance of his duties. He had to provide and keep a good horse—supervisors having to certify every eight weeks that their officers were “well mounted”—and pay his travelling expenses out of a salary of £50 a year. Not much room here for “indulgence !”

At this period the people groaned under an intolerable burden of hateful imposts. Excise duties were levied on all the luxuries and on most of the necessities of life, comprising such articles as salt, tea, coffee, soap, starch, candles, paper, hides,

skins, printed goods, glass, bricks, and of course, on beer, spirits, wine, and tobacco. Smuggling was rampant. Beer was illegally brewed and spirits illicitly distilled all over Scotland. Almost the entire population sympathised with, or connived at, the evasion of the Revenue Laws, which were necessarily severe and constantly exercised. Ruinous penalties were imposed, lengthy periods of imprisonment were inflicted, and unlucky smugglers were occasionally hanged for having killed an Excise or Customs officer in some desperate encounter. As a natural consequence of this state of things, the Revenue officers of the period were unpopular, for they were the visible embodiment of obnoxious and oppressive fiscal laws and regulations.

Burns was of opinion that it was not the Officers, whose duty it was to execute the laws, who were to blame, but those who made them, and squandered the money at home and abroad, and he recorded his opinion in these lines :—

“ Ye men of wit and wealth, why all this sneering
 ‘Gainst poor excisemen ? give the cause a hearing ;
 What are your landlords’ rent rolls ? taxing ledgers :
 What premiers, what ? even monarchs’ mighty gaugers ;
 Nay, what are priests these seeming godly wisemen ;
 What are they, pray, but spiritual excisemen ? ”

He was an active zealous officer, but several anecdotes are related which show that he sometimes tempered the wind to the shorn lamb. For instance, Professor Gillespie of St. Andrews, when at Thornhill on a fair day in 1793, saw Burns call hurriedly at the door of a poor woman, named Kate Watson, who, it was understood, was doing a little business on her own account for the day. With a nod and a movement of the forefinger Burns brought her to the door. “ Kate,” said he, “ are ye mad ? The supervisor and I will be in on ye in half an hour ; gude bye ti ye at present,” and with that he disappeared in the crowd. On another occasion, a woman—Jean Dunn of Kirkpartick, who had been brewing some beer duty free for the fair—observed Burns and another officer named Robinson coming towards her house. Jean slipped out at the back door, and left her servant and her young daughter to face the gaugers. “ Has there been any brewing for the fair here to-day ? ” “ Oh no, sirs, we hae nae licence for that ” replied the servant lass. “ That’s no true ” exclaimed the wee lassie “ the muckle kist is fu’ o’ the

bottles o' yill that ma mither sat up a' nicht brewin' for the fair " "We are in a hurry just now," said Burns, "but when we return from the fair we will examine the muckle black kist : come along Robinson."

The severity of the revenue laws of the period, and the poverty of the widows to whom he had shown mercy are pleaded in extenuation. "Let me look at the books of Burns," said Maxwell of Terraughtree at a Meeting of the District Justices, "for they show that an upright officer may also be a merciful one."

But he showed no mercy to the regular smuggler. One of the fraternity, not knowing Burns personally, offered, one night, to sell him some smuggled whiskey. "You've lichted on a bad merchant," said the Bard, "I'm Robert Burns the gauger." The fellow stared, then impudently replied "Aye, but ye're likewise Robert Burns the poet ; I mak sangs too, sae ye'll surely ne'er ruin a brither poet." "Why, friend," said Burns, "the poet in me has been sacrificed to the exciseman, and I should like to know what superior right you have to exemption," and, sangs or no sangs, the seizure was made then and there.

His system of doing business is described in a letter he wrote to Mr. Graham on 4th Sept., 1790 :—"Your letter reached me just as I was setting in to the whirlpool of an excise fraud-court, from the vortex of which I am just emerged. As my division consists of ten large parishes, and, I am sorry to say, hitherto very carelessly surveyed, I had a good deal of business with the Justices ; and I believe my *decreet* will amount to between fifty and sixty pounds. I took, I fancy, a rather new way with my frauds. I recorded every defaulter ; but at the court I myself begged off every poor body that was made to pay, which seeming candour gave me so much implicit credit with the honourable bench, that, with high compliments, they gave me such ample vengeance on the rest, that my *decreet* is double the amount of any division in the district." What did the public think of the Poet as an officer ? Mr. Ramsay of Ochertyre, writing to Dr. Currie in 1789, says : "When passing through Dumfriesshire with Dr. Stewart of Luss, I saw the Poet pass quickly, near Clcseburn, and said to my companion, 'That is Burns.' On coming to the inn, the ostler told us that Burns would be back

in a few hours to grant permits; that when he met with anything seizable he was no better than any other gauger; in everything else he was a perfect gentleman(!)" "Leniency to the smuggler," said Burns, "is an injustice to the honest trader."

Before he had been twelve months in the service he was promoted to Dumfries 3rd Division, on 28th July, 1790,* and had his salary increased from £50 to £70 a year. About this time Ainslie writes to a mutual acquaintance: "Our friend is now always in a hurry. He seems happy in his situation; a great mixture of the poet and the Exciseman: one day he sits down and writes a beautiful poem, and the next seizes a cargo of tobacco from an unfortunate smuggler."

Within six months after his first promotion—on 27th January, 1791—his name was entered in the Register of persons recommended for the supervisorship.† And, mark you, that entry was never cancelled. On the 28th of the following month he writes to Dr. Moore:—"I am going on, a mighty tax gatherer before the Lord, and have lately got myself entered on the list as an Examiner. I am not yet ranked as such, but in a few years I shall pass into the line of supervisorship by seniority." Exactly. He is now exceedingly busy—"Hurry of business" says he, "grinding the faces of the publican and the sinner on the merciless wheels of the Excise, making ballads, and correcting the press of two different editions."

In the meantime the affairs of the farm were going from bad to worse. Burns had few of the qualifications necessary for successful farming. He hated what he termed "chicaning bargain making;" he let the thistles grow, to "save the symbol dear;" he stopped the horses and wrote beautiful poems about mice and mountain daisies when a farmer—only a farmer—would have continued ploughing. "The heart of the man and the imagination of the poet," said he, "are the two grand considerations for which I live. If miry ridges and dunghills are to engross the best part of my soul immortal, I had better be a rook or a magpie at once, and then I should not have been plagued with any ideas superior to breaking of clods and picking up of grubs." As a farmer Burns was necessarily a failure.

* Appendix B.

† Appendix C.

George—the third in order—would have made a much better one. But George was born in a palace and became a King ; Burns was born in a cottage, and became a gauger. Much, in this world, depends on where you were born ! Yet, Burns was, and shall continue to be throughout the ages, the King of Hearts. For, what though :—

“Forsaken on the field ;
His regal vestments soiled ;
His crown of half its jewels spoil'd ;
He was a King for all.”

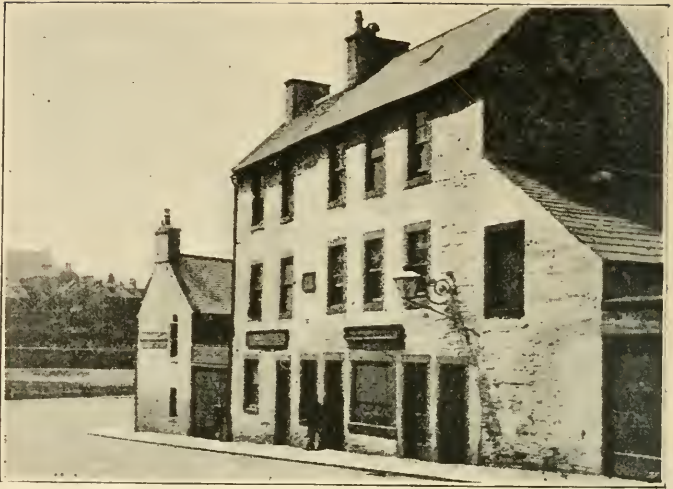
The three-and-a-half years he spent at Ellisland in his triune capacity of farmer, gauger, and poet, were the happiest, because the busiest, of his busy life. They were the brightest and best in his brief career. In the prime of early manhood, idolized at home, beloved abroad, full of energy and love and life, he galloped along the country lanes and mountain paths, humming sweet melodies, and dashing off immortal songs and poems that shall continue to delight and instruct mankind in the ages yet to come, when “man to man, the world o’er, shall brothers be, an’ a’ that.”

Having sold off his stock and farming implements by public roup, he removed with his wife, family, and furniture to Dumfries in December, 1791.

DUMFRIES, 1791-2. AGE 32-3.

“And now,” says Carlyle, “the noblest and ablest man in all the British lands might be seen, not swaying the royal sceptre, or the pontiff’s censer, on the pinnacle of the world, but gauging ale tubs in the little burgh of Dumfries.”

What a change ! From the farmhouse at Ellisland, beside the broomy banks of the Nith, to the “Wee Vennel” in Dumfries. This “courser of the sun,” who, with his whole soul, loved the Creator’s works, animate and inanimate ; who immortalized the mountain daisy and the mouse ; who strode along the mountain side glorying in the lightning, as it flashed “from pole to pole ;” who revelled in the rolling thunder as it reverberated amongst the hills ; who delighted to walk abroad in the quiet calm of a summer Sunday morning, and look through nature up to nature’s God, is now “cribb’d, cabin’d, and confined” like a caged eagle.



[Photo. by W. H. Williams.]

HOUSE IN WEE VENNEL—NOW BANK STREET—DUMFRIES,
IN WHICH BURNS LIVED.*

Your cold-hearted, methodical, mathematical, manuscript makers have invariably failed in their attempts to explain the erratic conduct of this gifted being, whose complex nature was altogether beyond their ken. Your dull, unlettered, unimaginative human being is content to traverse his daily millhorse round of monotonous work that he may eat and sleep and appear respectable. This was an utterly impossible life for Burns, with his keen intellect and social instincts. Was it any wonder, in these altered conditions, and under the threatening political thunder-cloud that hung suspended over his head for two long weary years, that he spent too many of his evenings at the King's Arms or the Globe? Ye shallow moral mongers; ye scribes and pharisees; ye, who know nothing of the labyrinths of the human heart; vacate that usurped judgment seat which you profane, and condemn not, that ye be not condemned. For:—

* Burns occupied the first floor; a flat of three small apartments, with one window in each. George Haugh, blacksmith, lived in the flat overhead, and John Syme had his office, as stamp distributor, on the ground floor.

"Who made the heart, 'tis *He* alone
 Decidedly can try us ;
He knows each chord : its various tone ;
 Each spring, its various bias.
 Then, at the balance let's be mute ;
 We never can adjust it,
 What's done we partly may compute,
 But know not what's resisted."

At the time Burns removed to Dumfries our American colonies had achieved their independence ; the French Revolution was in full swing ; the cry of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," found an echo in the heart of every enthusiastic lover of liberty in every corner of Europe. Wordsworth, Southey, and all the younger poets of the period participated in the feeling. And Burns? The electric condition of the political atmosphere carried him off his feet, and he loudly proclaimed the sentiments afterwards crystallized in that marvellous production "A man's a man for a' that." But Burns was never a Socialist. On the contrary, his heart was full of human brotherhood, which, as Lockhart remarks, is both conservative and democratic. Undoubtedly, Burns, being a paid servant of the crown, acted with imprudence in so loudly proclaiming his sympathies with the American patriots, and the French Republicans. But he never allowed his political sentiments to interfere with his public duties.

THE SOLWAY INCIDENT.

He was brave and fearless, and light-hearted withal, in his dealings with the smugglers. When the smuggling French brig *Rosamond*, ran aground in the Solway Firth, in February, 1792, Lewars, who had been despatched to Dumfries for a guard of dragoons, was long in returning, and one of the officers, becoming impatient, said :—"I wish the deil had him for his pains ; write a song about him, Burns." The Poet moved off a little distance, strode about for a short time, and returning, chanted to his delighted companions :—

"The deil cam fiddlin through the toon
 An' danced awa wi' the exciseman,

 He's danced awa ; he's danced awa ;
 He's danced awa wi' the exciseman."

Lewars returned shortly afterwards with his dragoons : Burns at once placed himself at the head of his small party, waded sword in hand to the brig, and was the first man to board. The vessel was condemned, and sold next day, with all her arms and stores, at Dumfries. Burns purchased four of her rusty carronades for £3, and, moved by some quixotic impulse, or humorous fancy, it is said he sent them to the French Legislative Assembly, with a letter requesting them "to accept them as a present, and a mark of admiration and sympathy." It is said they were seized by the Customs at Dover. Lockhart was the first to give an account of the transaction, and then he proceeded to draw the usual biographical inferences. He mixed up the Solway incident with the subsequent political one, and went hopelessly astray. There is not a single iota of evidence to show that either the Government or the Board ever heard the story about the guns. Yet Lockhart writes :—"There *appears to be little room to doubt* that this was the principal circumstance that drew on Burns the notice of his jealous superiors. The exact *result* of the Excise Board's investigation is *hidden in obscurity* ; nor is it at all likely that the cloud will be withdrawn hereafter. A *general impression*, however, appears to have *gone forth*, that the affair terminated in *something* which Burns himself considered as *tantamount* to the destruction of all hope of future promotion in his profession." (!) The italics are mine. When an officer applies for a better station, or for promotion, his character is "extracted,"* and, if found unfavourable, his application is refused. Within two months after the incident of the guns, Burns was appointed, at his own request, to Dumfries 1st Division,† a better station, with his salary and emoluments increased to about £90 a year. His application to the Board for this Division had been favourably entertained, which proves that his official character was faultless.

THE POLITICAL INQUIRY.

All through the year 1792, Burns fearlessly championed the cause of civil and religious liberty, and on one occasion, at a private party, when a toast was proposed to "William Pitt,"

* Appendix G.

† Appendix B.

Burns called for "a bumper to George Washington, the greater man of the two." His keen sense of the injustices which crushed the people in those tyrannous times impelled him to denounce "the system of corruption that existed between the executive power and the representative part of the legislature." He was encompassed by political and ecclesiastical enemies, as well as by smugglers and their sympathisers, and, in December, 1792, some "scoundrel," moved by political animosity, secretly denounced him to the Board of Excise, as being "a person disaffected to the Government."

The Commissioners at this time were George Brown, Thomas Wharton, James Stodart, John Grieve, and Robert Graham of Fintry. Some of the commissioners were for dismissal "without so much as a hearing, or the slightest intimation." But Robert Graham said: "No, Burns shall not be condemned unheard." Consequently, the Board directed Collector Mitchell to investigate and report. Having been informed by his collector that a Board's letter had been received ordering an inquiry into his "political conduct, and blaming him as a person disaffected to the Government," Burns at once wrote to Mr. Graham, and told him that "the allegation, whatever villain made it, is a lie. . . . To your patronage, as a man of some genius, you have allowed me a claim; and your esteem, as an honest man, I know is my due: to these, sir, permit me to appeal, . . . the misery which threatens to overwhelm me: with my latest breath, I will say it, I have—not deserved." To settle the matter, Mr. Corbet, a Surveying General Examiner, one of the Board's highest officials, was sent down from Edinburgh to Dumfries, to make an impartial investigation on the spot, and to report. And he was instructed—in advance, mark you—to inform Burns that "his business was to *act* not to *think*; and that whatever might be his opinion of men or measures, it was for him to be *silent* and *obey*."

When time had somewhat dulled the pain inflicted by this unjustifiable threat, he embodied the substance of the whole affair in four lines:—

"In politics if thou would'st mix,
And mean thy fortunes be,
Bear this in mind: be deaf and blind;
Let great folks hear and see."

Mr. Mitchell, the Collector, and Mr. Findlater, the Supervisor, were precognosed by Mr. Corbet, and testified that the accused was exact, vigilant, and sober ; that, in fact, he was one of the best officers in the district. His survey books and business papers were next examined, and found correct. This man, then, was proved to be an efficient officer : but, indeed, his efficiency had never been in question. Aye, but was he disloyal? That is the question. Within twenty-four hours after Mr. Corbet's arrival, all Dumfries knew that the conduct of Burns was being inquired into. Here, then, was a golden opportunity for his political, ecclesiastical, and personal enemies. Did they avail themselves of it? If not, why not? Where is the informer? Where are the proofs of disloyalty? In the meantime inquisitive eyes are curiously watching the suspected officer as he moves about, externally calm and collected, attending to his daily duties. The proud, independent soul suffers in silence and gives no sign. But think of him, as he sits "at his ain fireside," torn by conflicting emotions. The low breathing of his sleeping children, and the loud ticking of the clock alone disturb the silence of the night. His anxious faithful wife has retired to rest, but not to sleep. As he gazes into the fire he sees the "cloud-capp'd towers" of his castles in the air crumbling to ruin. His prospects of promotion appear to him to be blasted, and his character is at stake. The local gentry, who suspect him of disloyalty ; the cowardly calumniator who has traduced him to the Board ; the political partisans who have writhed under his stinging satires ; all are on the alert, ready, like a pack of savage hounds, to rush in and devour their victim.

"In naked feeling, and in aching pride,
He bears the unbroken blast from every side."

He thinks of sending in his commission "to save the Board the trouble of a dismissal." His vivid imagination pictures his "much loved wife and prattling little ones turned adrift into the world, degraded and disgraced, from a situation in which they had been respectable and respected, and left almost without the necessary support of a visible existence." He recalls to mind his favourite quotation from Young :—

"On reason build resolve,
That column of true majesty in man."



[Photo. by G. W. Wilson, Aberdeen.]

THE HOUSE IN WHICH BURNS LIVED AT THE TIME,
AND IN WHICH HE DIED.

He remembers that he entered the Excise for the sake of his wife and family, and he determines that for their sake he will remain in it :—

“ In spite o’ crowds, in spite o’ mobs,
In spite of undermining jobs,
In spite of dark banditti stabs
At worth and merit.”

This proud, resolute, independent man now stands at bay, and woe betide any political creature who may have the hardihood to attend at the excise office within the next few days, and be subjected to cross-examination under the dark thunder-laden lightning-flashing eyes of his intended victim. Mr. Corbet, the responsible representative of the Board, continued to prosecute his inquiries, and Burns was at hand prepared to repel any charges of disloyalty that might be formulated against him. Of eager, earnest utterances in favour of reform, and fierce denunciations of political abuses, there were enough and to spare, but of disloyalty or treason not a trace. The surveying-general reported favourably, the calumniator was disappointed and the malignant gossip of the hour began gradually to subside.

The nature of this inquiry, its results, and their effect upon the Poet's excise prospects have been ignorantly misrepresented by the biographers ; it was purely a departmental investigation at the instance of the Board of Excise into the alleged political misconduct of one of their officers. It is an open question whether, in this instance, the commissioners did not exceed their powers. Theirs were political appointments made by Government for Revenue purposes only. They had full powers of dismissal without reason assigned. But had they power to discharge a subordinate for political "sentiments?" Anyhow, the message sent was as absurd as cruel ; as futile as absurd. "To act, not to *think*; to be silent and *obey*." And Burns? What did he *think* of it? Three months afterwards, writing to Erskine of Mar, who, through Riddel of Glenriddel, had "come forward to befriend him, because poverty had made him friendless, and his British hardihood of mind had provoked the arbitrary wantonness of power," he continues:—"Accept, Sir, of the silent throb of gratitude, for words would but mock the emotions of my soul. You have been misinformed as to my final dismissal from the Excise: I am still in the service, In my defence to their accusations I said . . . that it would be insanity to sacrifice our constitution to an untried visionary theory. . . . In the *Poet* I have avowed manly and independent sentiments, which, I trust, will be found in the *Man*!" Burns was a poor man from birth, and an excise-man by necessity ; but—I *will* say it—the sterling of his honest worth no poverty could debase, and his independent British mind oppression might bend, but could not subdue. "Does any man tell me that it does not belong to my humble station to meddle with the concern of a nation? I can tell him that it is on such individuals as I that a nation has to rest, both for *the hand of support* and the *eye of intelligence*. . . . Those who reason and reflect . . . These are a nation's strength. . . . Burns I have drawn *as he is*. But should the Commissioners, is whose hands is the very bread he eats, get the least knowledge of the *picture, it would ruin the poor Bard for ever*. Commit this letter to the flames."

It was for expressing "sentiments" such as these that Burns was slandered and nearly ruined. He lived a hundred years

before his time, that was all. It has taken a century, and a succession of eminent British statesmen, backed by the British people, and supported by the press, to effect the reforms which Burns advocated, and for doing which he narrowly escaped dismissal and disgrace in these old and evil days, "without," as he says, "so much as a hearing, or the slightest previous intimation."

Wagon loads of learned discussions and ingenious speculations have been printed and circulated about this so-called "Government inquiry." Why, the whole affair consists of a few simple facts. Some political understrapper denounced Burns to the Board; an impartial inspector of the highest class was sent down to investigate and report; no evidence of treachery to the State or disloyalty to the Crown was to be found; the inspector reported favourably, and "the allegation, whatever villain made it," was found to be, in the words of Burns himself, "a lie."

Currie says:—"Circumstances occurred which retarded the Poet's promotion." His promotion was not retarded: the dates of the original recommendation and registration remained intact.* And Currie continues:—"After the enquiry the imprudent gauger was suffered to retain his situation." This is equivalent to saying that after a person had been tried for murder and acquitted, he was not hanged. He was "given to understand," continues Currie, "that his promotion was deferred and must depend upon his future behaviour." "Given to understand?" By whom? and when? "Future behaviour?" To act and not to think? This famous *ipse dixit* was not an official order, but merely a message sent by the Board before the enquiry; not after it. When Mr. Corbet's report came before the Commissioners for their consideration, they—in the words of a recent critic—"estimated the slanderer of the Poet at his proper worth. The Board might, perhaps, be narrow, but it was not vindictive; and it understood, the difference between an informer and a faithful servant." Mr. Findlater the supervisor, always held that the Poet's promotion was not affected, and that he would have gone on in the usual routine. The private

* Appendixes C and D

(1795)

S. H. Burns

D. fire 1 st 18 th 1895	11	In Br. 1 st , has a gauge, & took off work.
In. Burns off	11	usual length
D. fire 2 nd 18 th 1895	11	In Br. 1 st , a charge
D. fire 3 rd 18 th 1895	11	Marked at work: count
In. Burns off	11	depending stock - stocked tea &
D. fire 4 th 18 th 1895	11	So. 1 st 18 th 1895
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 5 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 6 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 7 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 8 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 9 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 10 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 11 th 18 th 1895	11	
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D. fire 12 th 18 th 1895	11	
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D. fire 82 nd 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
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D. fire 89 th 18 th 1895	11	
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D. fire 90 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 91 st 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 92 nd 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 93 rd 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 94 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 95 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 96 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 97 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 98 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 99 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	
D. fire 100 th 18 th 1895	11	
In. Burns off	11	

several other instances of like nature
Nothing else of consequence

In 1st had two gauges & a charge
Chanderi at work - Gauged Stock of
leather. - In Malt a gauge - stock
Tea & Tob^{co} 1st per weight -
saw nothing in the Books during
of immersion. -

Photo, by W. H. Williams

supervisor for several years. I must wait the rotation of the list, and there are twenty names before mine.”* Exactly. On 13th April, 1793, he wrote to Erskine of Mar:—“I have been partly forgiven; only I understand that all my hopes of getting officially forward are blasted.” But he gradually discovered that his hopes of promotion had not been blasted, and on 29th December, 1794, he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop:—“I have been appointed to act temporarily as supervisor in place of Mr. Findlater, who is absent on sick leave. I look forward to an early appointment as full supervisor.† My political sins seem to be forgiven me.”

Burns now realised the fact, and three days afterwards—on New Year’s morning, 1795—he sprang to his feet and sent ringing round the world the poor man’s proud acclaim:—

“A man’s a man, for a’ that:

* * * * *

The rank is but the guinea stamp—

The man’s the gowd for a’ that.”

An inspection of the specimen leaves taken from his official diary, and reproduced here in fac-simile direct from the originals, shows how diligently Burns performed his work.—On 24th Dec., 1794, he was engaged from 8 in the morning until 11 in the evening:—“m 8 & e 11.” On 23rd Feb., from “m 5 to e 7.”—From twelve to fourteen hours a day, usually. As supervisor, he also necessarily entered “complaints” of the class we have all heard so much about. Smith, an officer, is reported for a trifling omission on the 14th, and, on the other page, another officer is reported for “and several other instances of like nature.”

Another leaf from his official diary, kept then and now by all supervisors, shows that on the 10th of March, 1795, he was still officiating in place of Mr. Findlater. § When the latter resumed business, Burns of course returned temporarily to his own station.

The Poet at this period wrote and circulated a number of electioneering ballads in favour of Mr. Heron, the Whig candidate for the representation of the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. Heron was successful, and, having heard from a friend that

* Appendix D.

† Appendix D.

§ Appendix II.

Mr. Heron had expressed a strong desire to further his promotion in the Excise, Burns wrote :—"March, 1795. I am on the supervisor's list, and, as we come on there by precedence, I shall soon be at the head of that list,* and be appointed, *of course*. Then a friend might be of service to me. . . . The moment I am appointed supervisor, in the common routine I may be appointed on the collectors' list : and this is purely always a business of political patronage. A collector's salary varies from £300 to £800 a year. They also come forward by precedence on the list, and have, besides a handsome income, a life of complete leisure. A life of literary leisure, with a decent competency, is the summit of my wishes."

The great Napoleon was at this period gazing with covetous eyes across the Channel ; Volunteer corps were being constituted throughout the country, and Burns was among the first to enrol. At a public dinner of the corp he gave a toast :—"Gentlemen," said he, "may we never see the French—and may the French never see us." This wise and witty toast sounded in some ears like sedition, and it was actually received with murmurs of disapprobation. So Burns on his return home sent his bugle call—"The Dumfries Volunteers," sounding through the land :—

" Does haughty Gaul invasion threat ?
 Then let the loons beware, sir,
 There's wooden walls upon our seas,
 And volunteers on shore, sir.
 * * * * *
 Be Britain still to Britain true,
 Among oursel's united ;
 For never but by British hands
 Maun British wrangs be righted.
 * * * * *
 Who will not sing ' God save the King '
 Shall hang as high's the steeple ;
 But while we sing God save the King,
 We'll ne'er forget the people."

This stirring song filled the ranks of the Volunteers from John o' Groats to the Solway.

Burns was again exultant and full of hope, but it was only "a gleam of sunshine 'mid renewed storms," for at midsummer the Poet was himself sensible that his constitution was sinking.



A. FINDLATER, Esq.,
THE POET'S SUPERVISOR.

*Photographed from the Original Oil Painting in the possession of his
Grand-Nephew, Wm. Findlater, Esq., Dublin, by R. Forbes, Grafton St.*

Findlater says :—" It was not till near the latter end of his days that there was any falling off in respect of his attention to business, and this was amply accounted for in the presence of disease and accumulating infirmities." We have now an instance of this. The circumstances, although of no importance on their merits, demand elucidation in order to prevent probable future misrepresentations and ignorant comments.

The business of an Excise officer of the period comprised an infinite number of minute details, any omission or deviation being necessarily entered by the supervisor in his diary as a "complaint." An abstract of these, and of his daily work, was handed by him to his collector every collecting round, which occurred eight times a year. Findlater's eighth round abstract, extending from 8th June to 18th July, 1795, bristled with the usual "complaints." Burns had four: all he had during the six weeks: and all of trifling import. They were:—"Hides, page 36. Notice to draw leather, May 25 m 7. But no account taken thereof, till my survey on the 26 e 6. Old Brewery book, page 75, June 18 e 7. Second wort taken off by the assistant, but no second gauge thereof by the officer. Page 83, June 24. That brewing short charged one firkin, and 7.59 of a gallon. In the old permit book for wine, permits not registered in scheme."

Complaints of any importance were dealt with afterwards by the collector and the Board. Trivial complaints were wiped off by the collector, on the spot, on collecting day, and these were so written off by the collector, thus:—"Exd., J. M." (John Mitchell.) This and other diary abstracts were despatched to the chief office, in ordinary course, eight weeks afterwards.

On the margin is: 'Admonish Mr. Burns, A. D. Done, J. C. A. D. was the official at the central Board by whom the abstract was registered, and J. C. was another.

The following complaint appears in the same abstract against another officer:—"June 30. 80 lbs. tea credit; no permit. Officer says lost by accident." On the margin opposite this complaint, there is a similar entry:—"Admonish Mr. So-and-so, A. D. Done, J.C." But these marginal notes were not censures, nor were they made by the Board; nor were they considered to

be worth recording in the Board's books. It is impossible to convey to the general reader a true idea of their unimportance. The biographers mixed up the Solway incident and the political enquiry with the marginal remark in the diary abstract, and thus got lost in a fog of their own creating.

The Board certainly never sent Burns a censure, and nothing short of such could delay an officer's promotion. Mr. Findlater, writing to *Johnston's Edinburgh Magazine*, from North Wellington Place, Glasgow, in February, 1834, says :—“Had Burns been subjected to a Board's censure, I must *ex-officio* have known of it, as it could not have been concealed from me ; and I, therefore, consider the authority for what I have stated on this subject to be of the most unquestionable and decisive description, such, indeed, as nothing but the most obstinate prejudice will resist. All such censures are transmitted to the respective supervisors to be registered, and delivered to the officers, who must give written receipts for them. *I say, without hesitation, that Burns would, had he lived, have been promoted in due course, and that at a shorter period of service than any of his predecessors.*—(Signed), A. Findlater.”

Mr. R. W. Macfadzean writes exhaustively on the subject in the *Burns Chronicle* for 1896. One of our highest officials in the chief office, writing to me, says :—“I agree with Mr. Macfadzean. The admonition could not be regarded as an official censure, as it was inoperative in respect of any prejudicial effect on the Poet's official character.” And so, we dismiss the subject.

OCTOBER, 1795.—21st July, 1796. Age 35-6.

The health of the Poet now rapidly declined ; he was confined to his house in October, and, in accordance with the Excise regulations of the period, his salary was reduced to 15s. a week. Oh, the pity of it all ! On 15th December, 1795, he wrote to Mrs. Dunlop :—“If I am cut off, even in all the vigour of manhood as I am, gracious God, what will become of my little flock ? . . . But I must not think longer on this subject, so I shall sing with the auld Scotch ballad :—

" Oh, that I had ne'er been married,
 I would never had nae care ;
 Now I've gotten wife and bairns,
 They cry crowdie evermair.
 Crowdie aince, crowdie twice,
 Crowdie three times in a day
 An' ye crowdie ony mair,
 Ye'll crowdie a' my meal away."

The Poet's salary was small ; his household expenses were increasing ; he was suffering from what he termed " the supreme curse of trying to make three guineas do the work of five," and, being in want of a little ready money towards the end of December, he sent his servant girl round to the Collector with his well known rhyming epistle :—

" Friend of the Poet, tried and and leal,
 Wha, wanting thee, might beg or steal,
 Alake, alake, the meikle deil
 Wi' a' his witches
 Are at it, skelpin, jig and reel,
 In my poor pouches !
 I modestly fu' fain would hint it,
 That one pound one, I sairly want it ;
 If wi' the hizzie down ye sent it,
 It would be kind ;
 And while my heart in life-blood dunted
 I'd bear't in mind.
 So may the auld year gang out moaning
 To see the new come laden, groaning,
 Wi' double plenty o'er the loaning
 To thee and thine :
 Domestic peace and comforts crowning
 The hale design."

This was a request for an advance of a guinea out of his six weeks' half salary, amounting to about £5, and due in full on New Year's Day—a too common request in those days, but not " a loan," as stated by the biographers. The lines above quoted show incidentally that the collector esteemed the Poet, and also, that the Poet was poor. Still, " chance and fortune were sae guided," he was " aye in less or mair provided"—oftener less than mair—and when he died he owed no man anything.

Early in the following Spring he was suffering from a severe attack of rheumatic fever : about the middle of April he was

seldom able to leave his room ; and on the 4th of July he was conveyed to Brow-on-Solway to try the effect of sea-bathing. As he was about to leave home, his faithful wife, his bonie Jean, unable longer to control her feelings, burst into tears, and in the bitterness of her soul sobbed out: "What have a' yere fine friends done for ye now, Robert?" He kissed away her tears, soothed her feelings, and, after a pause, and speaking partly to himself, he said:—"You will be cared for, and as for me, aye, they will think more of me a hundred years after I am dead." How true the prophecy !



Photo. by E. Scott & Son, Carlisle

MRS. DUNLOP OF DUNLOP.

At Brow he was tortured by excruciating rheumatic pains. He was dying, and he knew it. His thoughts reverted to the old home—to the days of auld lang syne ; and in a letter to his brother Gilbert, he wrote:—"Remember me to my mother ;" and on 12th July, to Mrs. Dunlop, (the best and truest friend

he ever had): "Your friendship, with which for many years you honoured me, was a friendship dearest to my soul. The remembrance yet adds one pulse more to my poor palpitating heart. Farewell!!!"

Two days afterwards he wrote to his wife: "My dearest Love, Sea-bathing has eased my pains, and I think it has benefited me, but . . . I will see you on Sunday." On the 18th he returned in a small spring cart to Dumfries to die. The fatal illness, from which he had suffered so long, terminated his earthly career on 21st July, 1796.

Had he lived, he would have been appointed, in ordinary course, an Examiner at the Chief Office on 12th January, 1797.* And on the 10th of August, the same year, he would have been appointed supervisor at Dunblane, his successor on the list—James Lindsay—having stepped into his vacant place.†

When illness supervened, his excise prospects were bright and promising. Mr. Heron had pressed the acceptance of his political influence. Mrs. Dunlop had proffered hers at the Chief Office. Lady Glencairn, Mrs. Cunningham, and many more were his firm friends. Mr. Mitchell, his collector, was his friend. Mr. Findlater, his supervisor, writing from Glasgow on 10th October, 1818—twenty-two years after the Poet's death—expressly asserts:—"Had Burns lived I have *every reason to believe* he would have gone on in the usual routine. He was exemplary in his duties as an officer, and was jealous of the least imputation on his vigilance." The private records of the Board, of which Mr. Findlater had no knowledge, confirm the correctness of the supervisor's opinion. Mr. Graham sent a letter to the dying Poet proffering his help and assistance. The dying Poet knew that he was within measurable distance of being promoted to the rank of a fixed supervisor; and he also knew, as we have seen, that personal and political influence would soon have accomplished the rest. Snugly seated in the collector's easy chair, he would have enjoyed that "life of literary leisure with a handsome competency," to which he had looked forward so eagerly. Had health and life permitted, his choice of

* Appendix C.

† Appendix D.

the Excise as a profession would have been amply vindicated. A collector at the age of forty, what could he not have achieved as a Poet had he been spared for other twenty or five-and-twenty years?

Even the enemies of Burns must admit that the Excise ought to be the most competent judges of his conduct as an officer. What is their opinion? Findlater, his supervisor, has left it on record that "no officer under him was more regular in his duties than Burns." Mitchell, his collector, treated him as his "friend." James Macfadzean says: "no means of screening from the official eye, even trivial faults, existed," and he pronounces it to be impossible—impossible—that "Burns's habits could be, or could approach, what has been represented by some." Yes, the Excise, at anyrate, emphatically affirm and assert that if Burns did not "borrow credit from his profession, his profession borrowed credit from him."

Mr. Gladstone, writing on 27th November, 1895, says:—"The loyalty of the Excise force to the Poet is very remarkable and does honour to both."

In conclusion, allow me to refer to a few more instances of the services rendered to the Poet and the Poet's memory by the excise and their friends. Mr. Findlater, his supervisor, "sat up" with him throughout the night before he died, and he continued to vindicate the Poet's character until his death in 1839—43 years after Burns. During his last fatal illness, Burns was entitled to only £35 a year, but Adam Stobie, the young officer who officiated for him, and who was entitled to the remainder of his salary, periodically refused to accept of a single penny, and Burns thus retained his full salary until the day of his death. What profound emotions of gratitude and admiration must have surged through the soul of the dying Poet on experiencing conduct so like his own. All honour to Stobie. Jessie Lewars, the young daughter of his friend and fellow-officer John Lewars, ministered, as only woman can, to the suffering Poet (his wife being laid aside). She did much to smooth his dying pillow, and earned his profound gratitude. Gold or silver he had none to give, but he gave her something better far. He—of set purpose—linked her name with his, and

made it immortal. And so he dictated his last complete song,
 "To Jessie Lewars," commencing:—

"Oh! wert thou in the cauld blast
 On yonder lea, on yonder lea,
 My plaidie to the angry airt,
 I'd shelter thee, I'd shelter thee."

And thus:—

"The pitying breast that felt for human woe,
 The dauntless heart that feared no human pride,"

ceased to beat. And the brightest and kindest soul that was ever tortured and tormented by "the whips and scorns of time, the oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely, and the insolence of office," passed away to "the undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns."



[Photo. by H. William.]

BURNS MAUSOLEUM, DUMFRIES.

APPENDIX A.

A.—Extracts from the Books of the Scottish Excise Board, 1789 to 1797.

“Discovered at the Head Office, London, in the year 1857, by Mr. James Macfadzean, now retired Collector of Inland Revenue, Glasgow, and copied by me from the books themselves the same year.

(Signed)

GREENOCK, 2nd November, 1892.

R. W. MACFADZEAN,
CHIEF CLERK.”

“It may be explained that on the removal of the Excise Office from Old Broad Street to Somerset House, it was found necessary to destroy—from want of storage room—a miscellaneous collection of old books ; in order, however, that nothing of permanent value should go to the paper mill, I was entrusted with the duty of inspecting and preserving any papers likely to be of future use. While thus engaged, the Registers of the Edinburgh Board turned up ; on discovering the information relating to Burns, I immediately obtained permission from Mr. Dobson, the Excise Secretary, to make verbatim copies.

(Signed)

J. MACFADZEAN,
COLLECTOR.”

APPENDIX B.

B.—Dumfries Collection—John Mitchell, 1791.

Districts & Supervisors.	Officers' Names.	Divisions.	Foot Walk.	Day's Ride.	Date of Remove.	Succeeded by
DUMFRIES.	George Gray, John M'Quatter, <i>Robert Burns</i> , Robert Erskine, Wm. Corbett, junr., Wm. Johnston, Wm. Penn, Wm. Craig, James Dryden, Wm. Renton, Andrew Milligan, James Graham,	Dumfries 1st Div. " 2nd " " 1st Int. " 2nd " " 3rd " 3rd Div. Tobacco, Bridgend, Annah, Woodhouse, Lochnaben, Lockerby, Sanquhar,	Walk " " " " " Walk	* — 14 Rides 9 Rides 14 Rides * — 2 Rides 2 Rides 14 Rides 10 Rides 2 Rides	26 April, 92 28 July, 90 6 May, 90 21 Nov., 91 28 July, 90 26 April, 92 27 Jan., 91 22 June, 90 12 May, 90	<i>Robert Burns</i> Arch. Thomson John Lewars (Robt. Erskine (Danl. Campbell <i>Robert Burns</i> Peter Warwick Robt. Nevison John M'Culloch Thos. M'Adam
John Rankin, 7th March, 1791, Dead.						
7th March, 1791, Christopher Latimer, 1st.						
Alexander Findlater, 14th April, 1791.						

APPENDIX C.

C.—Register of Persons Recommended for Examiner and Supervisor.

Date of Treasury Letters, &c.	Persons Recommended.	When Appointed Examiners.
10th Oct., 1786, ...	Alex. Findlater * ... (<i>I here omit 24 names.</i>)	1st June, 1790.
25th Nov., 1789, ...	Gavin Train, ... (<i>I here omit 7 names.</i>)	11th Oct., 1794.
27th Jan., 1791, ...	Robert Burns, ...	Dead.
1st Feb., 1791, ...	James Lindsay, † ...	12th Jan., 1797.

* Burns' Supervisor.

† Stepped into Burns' vacant place.

APPENDIX D.

D.—Register of Persons put on the List for Examiners and Supervisors.

Date.	Names.	Board or Treasury.	When Appointed to the Office.	Time when and where settled as Supervisors.
10th October, 1786.	Alexander Findlater. (<i>I here omit 24 names.</i>)	Board.	1st June, 1790.	14th April, 1791, Dumfries.
25th Nov., 1789.	Gavin Train. (<i>I here omit 7 names.</i>)	Do.	1st Oct., 1794.	25th Aug., 1796, Alloa.
27th January, 1791.	Robert Burns.	Do.	Dead.	
1st February, 1791.	James Lindsay.	Do.	12th January, 1797.	10th Aug., 1797, Dunblane.
		&c.		

APPENDIX E.

E.—From the Board's Alphabetical Register of all the Divisions, Officers, Expectants, &c., in Scotland, as they stand at 10th Oct., 1789, with their Official Characters.

Official Characters.	Officers' Names.	Age.	Years employed.	Family.	Suspended or Discharged.
A good officer.	(I omit the names at Mr. Macfadyen's request.)	58	30	3	
Indifferent.		40	13	6	
A good officer.		32	4	1	
Indifferent. Drinks.		52	29	1	
A blundering officer.		34	6	4	
Was a good officer.	(Number of family includes officer and wife, if married.)	36	7	3	
A good officer and seizes.		29	4	2	
A sober, weak man.		30	4	1	
Pretty good.		29	4	1	Dis. 28 Nov. 91
Can do, but drinks.		31	10	1	
Could once do. Drinks.		51	30	3	Dis. 1 Jan., 94.
A careful officer.		26	4	1	
A drunken creature.		—	—	—	Suspended.
A sober, weak officer.		39	10	3	Suspended.
Makes a good officer.		28	3	5	Dead.
A slaving, good officer.	Robt. Burns.	44	23	5	
Can do, but drinks.		39	18	5	
A careful, good officer.		38	9	2	
A weak man, but sober.		33	7	1	
Turns out well.					
Never tried—a Poet.		29	1	6	
A careful, good officer.		38	9	2	Dead.
A pointed, good officer.		56	35	12	
But indifferent.		50	20	8	
Pretty attentive.		42	20	1	
The Poet does pretty well.	Robt. Burns.	32	3	7	

NOTE.—This second entry was made in 1792, the year of the political inquiry.

The number of "family" includes himself and wife.

APPENDIX F.

F.—Register of Censures.

A Register was kept of *all censures issued by the Board* of Excise, and this was carefully examined by Mr. James Macfadzean, and Burns' name was conspicuous by its absence. He was never censured by the commissioners, not even in the mildest form in which they were in the habit of recording their displeasure.

(Signed) J. MACFADZEAN.

APPENDIX G.

G.—Selected specimens of Officers' Characters Extracted.

(That is, by the Board—mostly for censures.)

“ He was a good officer but now tipples.”

“ A trifling officer—Drinks.”

“ A lazy supervisor much given to the bottle.”

“ A muddling officer who likes a glass.”

“ A bee in his bonnet.”

“ A conceited trifling officer.”

“ Slow—needs spurring.”

“ A good officer but insolent.”

“ A gentleman and a scholar.”

“ Self opinionative.”

“ Has a farm and attends to it more than to the Revenue.”

“ Active, and much for his own interests.”

APPENDIX H.
H.—Copy of Leaf from Burns' Official Diary as Acting Supervisor.

	[1795] March		Miles	Common Brewers	Victuallers	Chandlers	Tanners	Tawers	Maltsters	Wine	Spirits	Tea	Tobacco	Tobacco Manufacturers	
	10	M 10													
Lochmaben		Newmains	...	8	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...	In V. V, a Gauge,—In Malt, a Gauge. Examined Books, and found nothing to blame. R. B.
Jno. McCulloch	to	Residence	...	1	...	4	...	1	...	1	2	1	2	...	
	p Nn	Brimhill	...	3	...	...	...	...	1	...	...	...	...	...
				12	...	4	...	1	...	2	1	2	1	2	...

EPITOME.

Born 25th January, 1759.

Entered on active service, Autumn, 1789.

Promoted to Dumfries 3rd Division, 28th July, 1790.

Recommended for Examiner, 27th January, 1791.

Promoted to Dumfries 1st Division, 26th April, 1792.

(Political Inquiry, January, 1793.)

Appointed temporary Supervisor, December, 1794.

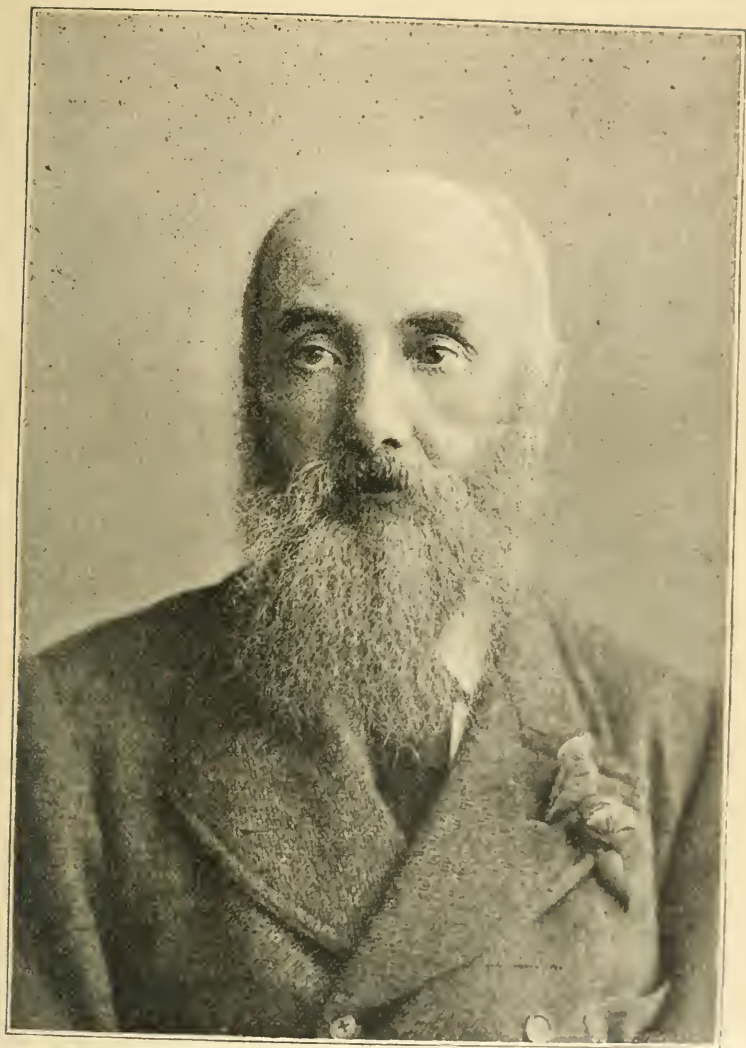
(Died 21st July, 1796.)

Would have been Examiner, 12th January, 1797.

Would have been appointed Supervisor, 10th August, 1797.

Might have been appointed Collector, 1798.

MR. GLADSTONE ON BURNS :—DEAR SIR, I thank you for your interesting tract on Burns, and for again calling my attention to him. That extraordinary man deserves every amount of attention from those who can give it; but I am sorry to say, it never has been, and is not now, in my power to make an adequate study of his singularly mixed character.—Your very faithful, W. E. GLADSTONE. July 20th, 1896.



(Photo. by B. Scott & Son, Cardiff.)

JOHN SINTON.

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